



synth music playing by RedJelloLife

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Friendship, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Dustin H., Lucas S., Max M., Mike W.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-07-06 19:57:09

Updated: 2019-10-05 16:33:29

Packaged: 2019-12-12 14:15:54

Rating: T

Chapters: 22

Words: 20,164

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It always feels like forever when you were missing your friends. SET AFTER SEASON 3: what happens when the 1st high school party, months after Will and El move away, reunites the gang and reminds them who they are to each other. Another wild adventure begins which MAY be connected to the Upside Down. Lucas/Max, Dustin/Suzie, & El/Mike - MULTI-CHAP

1. Chapter 1

Thanks so much for coming to read ya'll and I hope you like. I don't know how this is actually going to end so if you have any idea let me know in reviews or PM (I won't think it's weird and I'll check it often) I want to see where this actually goes! Follow if you're interested in finding out too. Thank you!

[synth music playing]

PART 1 : The first high school party

Dustin is in the middle of what has been an extremely long and difficult conversation with his girlfriend from Salt Lake City, Utah, Suzie. He doesn't know why he ever let Mike convince him, but he is going to have cancel their date.

"I just don't see why I have to be less of priority then some stupid party. What are you even going to do there? Parties are no good. It's just a popularity contest for who can be the most asinine and immoral."

"This isn't going to be like that. I just, I promised Mike and I know this is our special night Suzie-poo, but I know this really matters to him. He has friends coming and he's going to be here any minute. I just need to know that you'll be okay."

"I'm perfectly fine without you Dustin. And if that's the choice you want to make, you can radio me tomorrow after your party and I might answer! OVER and OUT."

Dustin rubs his palm roughly against his forehead and looks over to his turtle tank for support. Mike is going to be responsible for him losing his girlfriend. Dustin has not gotten dressed for tonight. He is wearing the same simple shirt he wore to the Quarry that morning when he collected some samples for a pet project he's started working on. He figures it will have to do.

Mike's first stop of the night is Dustin's. He asks his dad to borrow the old jalopy knowing he would have it filled by the end of the night and he plans to be the designated driver and not let anything to happen to it or else it will be his ass.

He expects Dustin's mom to open the door. Ms. Henderson really was a nice old lady, if not a little strange. Instead, Mike is surprised to see Dustin. He barely acknowledges him and simply waves him through the door.

"Why are we going in? We have to go right away. Why aren't you dressed? We're going to be late if you haven't even started yet."

"I am dressed; this is what I'm wearing," Dustin says walking to the fridge and pulling out a pitcher of pre-made Kool-Aid.

"No! No, you're not," Mike starts to shake.

"What do you mean? What's wrong with it?"

"Dustin —you just, you can't wear that. Trust me—it's all wrong." Dustin gives him an incredulous look. "Please do it for me!"

"Do it for you! *DO it for YOU?!* Suzie might never speak to me again because I'm going out tonight rather than spending it with her on our weekly radio-date! I am doing this for you!"

"Whoa, whoa, man calm down! I swear you're going to have fun. Will is going to be there! Suzie—Suzie will get over it. You two really have something special and she won't just toss it all aside because of one stupid radio date."

"That's what you think," he says pouring himself another glass. He spills some on his shirt. When he makes eye-contact with Mike, his friend is happier than he'd like to admit.

"I'll get you something else," Mike says running to Dustin's bedroom. Dustin follows close behind him shouting after him, *STOP!* and *NO!*

Max is applying a coat of lipstick while jamming out to her newest Madonna tape. She does a once-over in the mirror and goes back to

her closet to see if there is anything she can add. She's been doing this back and forth dance since she kissed her mom goodnight and returned to her room after dinner.

Max looks to her night table, specifically the alarm clock, which now reads 8:00PM. She isn't proud of the squeal that comes out of her lips. She throws the closet door closed; she'll have to go as is. She switches off her table lamp and makes sure her pillows are propped up in her bed in case her stepdad decides to check on her.

She climbs out her window and runs down a block and half to the next intersection where a car is ready to pick her up.

"You kept me waiting..."

"Oh, shut up," she says planting a wild kiss on his lips. She's so excited for tonight to begin and to be reunited with her friends.

~A.N. Thoughts on what sort of drama happens at high school parties that I can include? Drop some comments :)

2. Chapter 2

"I'm just saying it's not the best time to be going to a party."

"What's the worst that can happen?" Mike asks Dustin.

"Bad stuff. Worse. A lot worse."

"You're crazy!" Mike hears a noise and his head shoots to the right as he sees a bus approaching. "Look it's coming!" He checks his watch. *They're not late*, he thinks to himself.

"It's a good system. They manage 3 trips a day and it runs every 6 hours now. The road system has improved to produce easier, delay-less, traffic-free trips." Mike gives him a curious look with furrowed eyebrows. Dustin opens his mouth into a giant "WHAT" shape. Mike shakes his head and turns back to the bus, which will park right across from the pair. He shakes his keys aimlessly and walks toward it as it begins to empty. The first head is a familiar bowl-cutted friend of Mike's.

"Will! Will!"

"Mike!" he throws his arms around his friend. The last 4 months had been actual hell. It was closing on the last months of their freshman year and first full year not attending the same school since they met in Kindergarten.

"I-I-missed—"

"WILL!" Dustin's voice reached a deeper register and took Will's attention. They proceeded to grip onto each other for an excessively long bear hug with Will being lifted off the ground twice in the process.

Mike's attention is drawn back to the bus where the next passenger to disembark is...

"El!" she doesn't waste time nearly jumping into his arms. She drops her duffel bag to reach the back of his neck and hold on easier.

"Mike," she whispers into his ear; it's more like a sigh.

While Thanksgiving had worked out in terms of him going to visit her and Will for an overnight stay at Ms. Byers' house, Christmas hadn't worked out. It had been months of trying to keep things the same while everything had changed. He dreamed about the easy days of the early summer when he'd visited her cabin daily and kissed her just as often.

"Alright lovebirds, let the bus leave," the driver says loudly. Mike looks up and El peeks over her shoulder. Mike still holding onto her takes enough steps back that the mechanical door has the room to close and the bus can take off.

Dustin grabs her bag off the pavement.

"You heard him, lovebirds, let's at least get back to the car."

"Dustin," she smiles and hugs her friend. "It's good to see you."

"Good to see you too," he says politely before adding on, "everyone please back to the car. The sooner we leave the sooner I may be able to get home and convince Suzie not to dump me."

"You got dumped?" El's eyes go wide.

"Don't give her any ideas please, I've already been on the receiving end once. It's not fun," Mike shivers. El smiles at him pityingly.

Lucas was already in bed, but he couldn't sleep. He tossed and then turned back over. Checking the clock on his desk, he realized why it was even more difficult to sleep. It was 8:15PM. Who goes to bed at 8:15PM? He disparaged himself. *Get it together, Lucas!* He thought.

He looked at his side table at the last picture taken of him and Max. He didn't know what he'd done wrong, but when she dumped him again after what he thought was a small fight, she didn't take him back and she became more distant with the rest of the party. The year of losing kept getting worse.

"Lucas! Lucas, do you copy?" Mike was radio-ing him again.

He ignored the static and closed his eyes.

"Lucas, please come. I haven't seen you in months. It would be great to see you. Everyone's coming please," this was a different voice—Will.

"HI LUCAS- SSSS," that would be Dustin. He probably got spit all over the walkie.

"Lucas, I don't know what's wrong, but I would like to see you again, friend, before I have to go back. Hope to see you there. Over," and last was Eleven.

Lucas got up and looked in the mirror. He could look worse. He'd been better, but that didn't mean he couldn't kill at this party tonight. Max wouldn't know what hit her.

~A.N. LUMAX fans hang tight! It's going to be a wild ride. Leave comments on how you want Lucas and Max's relationship to unfold and what you think of their relationship on the show?! :)

3. Chapter 3

Max walked into Reggie Casing's two-story home with Troy, the always memorable class bully from Hawkins Middle—who'd gotten a lot nicer since he broke his arm 2 years ago. He was slightly taller than her with brown hair and mud brown eyes. He immediately went to get them drinks and she was excited for it.

Reggie walked by with a paper crown that looked like it was made by a 5th grader and went out the front door. Mike had just parked across the street in the neighbor's driveway.

"It's the other birthday boy!" Reggie called out.

"Mike? It's your birthday?" El blanched. Mike turned pink.

"I didn't want it to be a big deal. Most people forgot."

"I'm so sorry I forgot," Will put his hand on Mike's shoulder.

"No, I'm glad you did. This is just a regular party. Reggie just found out. I just wanted to be with my friends anyway."

"I didn't forget buddy. I am my birthday gift to you," Dustin pointed to himself.

"Thank you," Mike retorted sarcastically and Dustin tightened his smile. They walked up the path to the front porch. There were red solo cups already lining the banister. El looked surprised by the noise on the inside.

"Crowded," she held on to Mike's arm.

"Don't worry, I got you," he said making a bee-line for the kitchen. "What's your poison?"

"Poison?" El asked.

"Figure of speech, what do you want to drink?" Mike asked her. El looked around. She knew what the cans of Coke tasted like. The giant punch bowl was intriguing. She pointed at it.

"Are you sure? It's not just juice."

"Pour it!" Max yelled surprising Eleven. She'd already had two cups of the stuff herself. "El! I missed you." Eleven hugged her back, not recognizing the difference in her appearance and attitude.

"It's good to see you. How have you been?" Eleven asked her. Max wasn't fully paying attention. She was staring at Mike.

"What are you looking at?"

"Hi Max," he said quickly. El finally caught onto something being wrong.

Dustin knew that Mike cared so much about him coming to the party so that he could spend time with Will and he could hang out with his girlfriend. He understood. If he had the opportunity to have one night out with Suzie, he'd probably do the same thing. He knew Mike would do it for him. He would need that if he had to plead with Suzie and travel to her in Utah. He's not sure how far the two of them would be able to get, but it was still an option in the lower half of the alphabet.

Will had a lot to talk about to Dustin. He figured Mike would find time for him later like he always did. El came first now. Before Will could crack open any of the topics he wanted to catch up with Dustin, another familiar face walked through the door.

Lucas looked like himself but with more facial hair than Will remembered.

"Lucas, you made it!" Dustin went to hug him first. Some of the other party guests looked at him weird. Will interrupted to shake his hand.

"Will, it's good to see you, man. What's new with you?"

"So much, I—" he was about to break into his opportunity when Lucas saw Max coming out of the kitchen. Lucas wanted to back out of the door but instead he held his ground and she eventually saw him standing there too.

"Lucas, you're here" she said before tripping over her feet and falling

face-forward right into his arms.

"Oh no," he mumbled.

"Leave her, she's my girlfriend now—so back off!" Troy said pushing off Lucas who had carried Max over to the couch. He had three of his own friends backing him up so Lucas let her go. Will, Dustin, Mike and El stood nearby and he moved back over to them, looking back at her to see if she was okay.

"His girlfriend?" El asked the boys.

"Yeah, he—she, um, dumped him."

"They didn't get back together?" El wondered. Dustin shook his head once. The others stayed silent. Lucas was still looking back. He turned to El.

"Could you, um—make sure she's okay?" he asked her. El nodded kindly. Lucas looking relieved walked away into the kitchen. Mike followed her over to Max's side. Troy wasn't much of a nurse.

"She's my friend," she said, which was enough to get her close to her. "She needs water and medicine." Troy rushed to get it. With him gone, El and Mike both sat with her. "Why is she acting different?"

"It's complicated, I guess. She got weird after a while and she stopped talking to everyone in the party, not just Lucas. He still—you know—cares about her obviously. Just don't tell her I told you that."

"I don't think I can talk to her at all," El said picking up her wrist. When she let go, it dropped neatly into Max's side. "I'm sorry. This isn't the party you wanted."

"Are you kidding? Things not going as planned. Having to watch out for my friends. Being with you—it's just like old times," he smiled brightly, and she put her head on his shoulder. He kissed her forehead.

~A.N. I had a lot of fun writing this part. Finding each character's voice is such a treat for me to experience things from their perspectives. How do

they speak? Is this believable? I am definitely thinking about all of this as I write. Leave comments about whether or not you like it so far! TY :)

4. Chapter 4

"Do you have a plan?" Will asks Lucas.

"A plan for what, Will?" Lucas asks taking a shot of whatever he can find.

"Hey! Be careful with those shots. You have no idea what's out on this table!" Dustin demands overbearingly.

"What do you know anyway?" Lucas says banging the now empty glass on the countertop. "I mean—did you hear the way she said my name? As if she was looking for me or waiting for me. She's such a faker."

"What are you saying about my girlfriend now?" Troy walks into the kitchen.

"Nothing, just ignore me," Lucas says rolling his eyes. Troy isn't willing to let it go.

"Why are you even here, Luke? If you have a problem, you should find your way out. I'm guessing you can find the door." Lucas avoids his eyes. Troy inches closer, "Trust me, she doesn't want you and she definitely does not need you so go back home and play games with your freaky little friends. What's up Zombie Boy? Still kicking?" Lucas holds his tongue, but makes a threatening motion. Troy laughs and grabs a bottle of water and an Ibuprofen from the cabinet. Will and Dustin exchange looks wondering if the smart move would actually be to leave before something starts.

In the time that Mike and El are sitting with Max. She regains some mobility and tosses over confused. El is ready and smiling, rubbing hair from her face.

"It's hard to get up."

"You should stay there. He's getting you water and some medicine. He should be back soon."

"Lucas?" she asks almost hopefully.

"No, um—what's his name?" El asks Mike. He mumbles it. "Yeah, Troy."

"I saw Lucas," she says insistent.

"He's here. He helped you get to the couch," Mike adds.

"Well, I'm a mess," she throws her hand up to her face covering her eyes. "Can you get me Lucas? I think I want to talk to him. I would get up but um," she looks down at herself. Eleven gets up. Mike would rather walk away than be left alone with Max, but El sits him back down.

"I'll be right back," she says before she disappears into the crowded living room maze.

"So, um, how's—school?" Mike asks Max to break the silence between them. All around the party is still going on and the synth music playing makes it hard for her to hear him especially with her headache kicking in.

"I'm sorry about the kitchen. I think I lashed out at you. I shouldn't have done that. I only wanted to come here tonight because I knew you were bringing El."

"Oh well, I'm glad. I know she missed you a lot."

"She missed you more I'm sure," she pauses. Mike shifts uncomfortably. Max and him never had the strongest relationship. If they bonded at all, it was over El and doing their best to keep her safe last summer. Although they definitely had different opinions on what that meant. "Things changed after she left. Nothing here was really the same."

"It can be hard to deal with," Mike agrees.

"You mean for me," Max replies quietly.

"No! No, I—I didn't. I didn't mean you specifically. All people! Like, hard on people in our party—sort of," he continues speaking trying to find the right words. He doesn't want to end up in a hole, but it seemed he already dropped himself in it.

El was lucky to go into the kitchen when she did. A second after and she would have been trying to pull the boys apart. She listens in before making her presence known.

"You think she's 'fake'. I'm sure she'll love to know that's what you think of her. Give it up! It's obvious you're jealous. It's pathetic," Troy says with such assurance, narrowing in on Lucas who he has pushed up against the counter.

"Lucas!" El yells out. "She's up. She wants to talk."

"To me?" Lucas balks. Troy is late to understand. His friend redelivers the same information.

"No—no! If you go to her, you're dead. You hear me? Not a policeman alive can protect you. She's drunk. She doesn't know what she's saying and if you try and take advantage of her, I'll have you knocked out and locked up, freak!"

"She wants Lucas," Eleven repeats with intensity. She has never been scared of bullies. Why should she worry about them after her experience with the Upside Down and the Bad Men? She hadn't made many more friends than Will in high school. They sometimes teased the way she spoke, although her English had gotten much better since she started attending school formally. Still, she'd gotten used to being surrounded by Mouth Breathers.

Lucas takes advantage of El's distraction to get under Troy and catches her by the door.

"Hey, is there something going on here I should know about?" a drunk Reggie dressed as a king is in the doorway.

"Nothing, man. Great party, except for these idiots." Reggie looks at the ragged group of them.

"Aren't ya'll Mike's friends?" They all nod in response. Yes, they are. "Nah Troy, these guys are cool. If you have an issue, you should come back later." Reggie says drunkenly waving them out of his house. Troy and his friends' guffaw assuming he's joking. When he manages to narrow his eyes at them, they realize he's kicking them out. Troy

cracks.

"This isn't over, Luke."

~A.N. Anyone else surprised that Max would ever be with Troy?! Well I think I have some psychological reasoning that will make more sense in a future chapter.

~A.N. I love to explore El without powers and how she sees the world. Season 4 is going to be great. Leave comments on how you think El is going to be without powers or maybe some theories on when/how she'll get them back... :)

5. Chapter 5

Eleven is giggling when she rushes back to Mike. Mike is confused to say the least.

"What? What's so funny?" his furrowed brows drawn together.

"Stupid boys were going to have a fight over a girl," she gestures with open hands to Max. "Then, the drunk king kicked them out," she laughs.

"Wait, who got kicked out?" Mike asks nervously.

"NOT US!" Dustin follows up behind and puts both hands on El's shoulders surprising her. She bursts into giggles. He even gives a high five to Will who still looks a bit shaken by the prospect of having to fight or in his case, if he's being honest, probably just get beat up. He knows his mother would never let him leave the house again if he returned home with any visible bruise. He could even imagine her *accidentally* barging into his bedroom or the bathroom to see if he is lying to her. His shivers are very much real.

"Guys, guys, come on it's serious," Lucas says without humor. Eleven bites her lip and tries hard to compose herself better. "El said you wanted to talk to me," Lucas says and replaces Mike on the couch. He gives Max the water and Ibuprofen that Troy never returned. Max lifts herself up and takes both from him. She looks up and has 4 curious faces looking at her.

"Do you mind?" Max asks them. They grumble to themselves and make themselves scarce.

"So, what have you been working on?" Will asks. They got a rectangle of wall space halfway to the garage and laundry room and the music from the other is pumping louder than Will's usual volume.

"Fault lines," Dustin responds instantly.

"What?" Will replies confused. He wonders if he heard him wrong or

if Dustin actually said "four slides."

"You asked what I've been working on. As much as I love physics. Mr. Clarke will always be the Master in my eyes. My curiosity door has opened again to something completely different."

"What?" Will asks now with his customary awed tone.

"Have you ever wondered about the Earth's moving tectonic plates?" he looks both ways dramatically, before leaning closer conspiratorially, "Did you know Sattler's Quarry falls on the New Madrid Seismic Zone?"

"Are you talking about earthquakes?" his friend inquires. Dustin shushes him so Will repeats his question in a quieter voice that barely makes it over the music.

"Oh yeah!" Dustin smiles and nods eagerly.

"But Indiana doesn't get earthquakes. Earthquakes occur along the fault lines and most of those of those are along the coasts near water."

"That's mostly true, but this Seismic Zone has a history of earthquakes and pretty big ones too. It stretched over 300 miles from Indiana down along the entire Mississippi River. You got to admit it's cool!"

"Yeah pretty cool, so what exactly are you studying?"

"I have a soil collection kit to measure any changes in granular configuration, depth, that sort of thing. Let me tell you based on all the sources of information out there we're about due for a another one."

"Another what? Earthquake?" Will's eyebrows raise. Dustin confirms it with a nod.

"The last one over 150 years ago levelled a whole town. Cat-as-trophic!" Dustin emphasizes each syllable. Will gets a shudder that reminds him of bad feelings he would rather forget.

Eleven catches her breath after a super intense kiss.

"I thought you wanted to go to a party."

"We are at a party," he smiles devilishly and El smiles back gleefully. He gives her a smaller peck that works its way into another super intense kiss. She missed this.

After they were banished from the living room couch, Mike led the way, holding Eleven's hand as they climbed up to the second floor. The music got quieter and the voices became more of an echo. Mike peeked into the rooms first in case something was going on that would freak El out. He didn't want her to get the wrong idea or be traumatized. The room he found empty was a study, not a bedroom, and the moment he opened the door he knew it was meant to be. Eleven saw it too and her eyes widened.

An exquisite specimen... a chocolate brown La-Z-Boy.

She rushed in smiling and threw herself into the chair. It rocked back with her weight before coming center again. Seeing how happy she was made Mike laugh. She patted the little square of chair next to her. Mike raised his eyebrows cheekily. He knew he would be too tall to fit comfortably but that just meant they'd have to sit extremely close together. They shifted awkwardly until they found a good place.

"OOH!"

"What?" Eleven asked him nervously.

"This feels good," he smiles back at her wickedly.

"That's not funny," she said seriously, but now the tables had turned and he couldn't stop smiling inappropriately. "Not funny!" she cried again pounding his chest but eventually finding the humor in his prank.

"I'm sorry I just I had to. I had to!" his Adam's apple bobbed.

"You didn't have to," she reaffirmed.

"You're right, you're right. I'm sorry. Will you forgive me for my *grave*

error?!" he said wistfully leaning his head closer. He stared at her lips. She faintly nodded and kissed him first.

~A.N. So clearly I love Mileven and enjoy writing it. I did my research looking at previous seasons and was really happy I can nod to the first season by bringing back the La-Z Boy. Stuff like that makes me happy. Leave a comment if there's a good throwback from Mileven S1-3 that might fit in my story. I'll see how to include it. TY :)

6. Chapter 6

"So, what did you want to talk about?" Lucas asks Max after she had finished swallowing two pills with water.

"Troy and you almost fought?" she asks. Lucas makes a scrunched-up face as he thinks about how to explain it. Max sighs, annoyed she is involved with guys so dumb.

"I don't think we were actually going to fight. I wouldn't. He's not worth it."

"Am I worth it? ...To you, I mean."

"Of course, you are! But I know you'd hate it. You *hate* and-I-quote '*chauvinistic displays of masculinity and monogamy*,'" he repeats to himself slowly hoping to get it right.

"Misogyny," she corrects him.

"Misogyny, right! I tried limiting that as best I could because we're friends. He's just—you know," he rolls his eyes. Max doesn't smile. She's dealing with too many conflicting thoughts.

"Are we friends though?"

"What kind of question is that? Of course, we're friends," he responds confidently. "Not that great right now, but I know we will be one day." As he says it, he knows it's true.

"What if—what if I wanted to be more than friends?" she pauses. Lucas freezes in an effort to not get excited. He's never been on this side of a break up. *She isn't taking me back this time*, he thinks, *I'm the one who's in control*.

"I don't know. I mean you broke my...you know—" he waits for her to say it.

"Your heart?" she offers. "Well so did you," she sighs still conflicted. Max's heart is telling her two different things that cannot co-exist. Lucas squints wondering what she meant by that. Max shakes her

head. "Forget it. It's dumb."

"I don't think it's dumb at all," Lucas says, relinquishing any control he had. "I'd like that. You know to go back to the way things were..."

That's the last thing Max wants to hear. They can never go back and that was the point.

"Ugh! Or, maybe I don't want to be friends at all," Max snaps. Lucas is shocked. "Do you even get why we broke up?"

"Whoa!" he interjects. "Look, just to clarify, you dumped *me* after *one* stupid fight!" Lucas may not have had any other experience with relationships, but he still knew that he had no part in her decision to break them up.

"That's what you think!" her eyes widen. "IT WAS 'STUPID'? That is just like you Lucas! That's what you always do, you wipe away your fault and make *yourself* into the good guy."

"What are you *talking* about?" he looks at her baffled. "You're crazy!"

"You just apologize and everything's supposed fine. That doesn't work all the time, dummy! It can't!"

"It wasn't important; it was stupid! I missed one date because I made plans with Mike and Dustin. You made a huge stink—you called my house twice while I was out—and then, you wouldn't answer *me* back, and like a week later, you were with Troy," Lucas tries to hold himself together, but she makes it extremely difficult. "How is that my fault?"

"You're unbelievable," she said brushing him, and the couch blanket, off of her and heading out of the room. The back door leads to a padded backyard with a patch of grass and a garden shed.

"Alright then, what was it?" Lucas chases after her. "I know it wasn't your birthday—February 8th—and it wasn't our anniversary—December 15th; so, what did I do to break us up?"

"We should go back to our friends," Eleven says as she pulls away

from a kiss.

"Already? No way, it's too early."

"Twenty minutes."

"So?" he asks her incredulous.

"I'm only here for one night."

"That's exactly why we should stay!" he says. His tone says that she just proved him right. He sneaks another kiss.

"Mike." It's a clear statement. Mike throws his head back and groans. He gets up slowly and gives her his hand to help her get up too. Eleven smiles knowing he feels that way.

"Now you come say hello to your friends!" Dustin cries out when he sees Mike and Eleven on the staircase hand-in-hand. "Where have you two been? Hmmm." His attempt at embarrassing Mike doesn't work. His friend roughs him up jokingly.

"We came back to enjoy the party," Mike's smile is painfully fake and he throws in a thumbs-up for good measure. Eleven nudges her head into his shoulder.

He's grown even taller since the last time she saw him, but she'll always remember him as the little kid she first met in the woods. He'll always be the boy who kept her safe in a tent in his basement and defended her when she thought she was a monster. Her friends supported her in dark, and light, times. Nearly losing them brought to life some of her worst fears and being apart from them is one of the worst pains she ever felt. At least for tonight she felt safe again.

Mike wraps his arm around her and poses a question to his friends.

"So, what did we miss?"

~A.N. We're so close to the bombshell: why did Lucas and Max break up?! I knew they were going to be broken up when I first started the story but I had to really think before I could come up with something that would

suit their characters and the direction I wanted the story to go in. I hope you don't mind my big reveal next chapter. Leave a comment about relationships. What makes them work or fail? What do you think? I'm curious to hear :)

7. Chapter 7

"Leave me alone, Lucas..."

"Just tell me, Max." Max stops walking, and although the inside of the house is noisy, it seems deathly quiet in the backyard.

Lucas waits quietly as different basses from the stereo signal changes to the music. They sit in silence for at least 10 minutes. It's the longest 10 minutes of his life. He waits because he knows she needs this, and as annoyed and stressed as he is already, he wants Max back and he needs to know why she hates him.

"December 23rd." It's the first word she said in a while.

"What is that?" He guesses, "The day before Christmas Eve!"

"No, you idiot," she admonishes him without malice. "It's Billy's birthday. I never actually celebrated it before, or wanted too. He treated me the worst when he was alive, but after everything that happened—I didn't want it to be over like that. I didn't want to just forget him. His dad wasn't going to do crap for him. Honestly, he acts like Billy never even existed. I told you over the phone a week before that I wanted to do something for Billy. I planned to go to the cemetery, visit his tombstone, maybe even leave some flowers," she shrugs, "but you forgot about those plans completely and chose to hang out with your friends instead. I couldn't go alone so..." Lucas hangs his head in shame. She continues, "You apologize and apologize, but you don't even know what you're apologizing for."

Lucas never felt this bad before. While he knew he wasn't perfect, he didn't think of himself as cruel. After what he did and how he blamed her, he's surprised she would even speak to him. She was even trying to forgive him, but although he was a complete jerk who didn't deserve her—not even close.

"Max...I wish I could say something else, something I haven't already said, but I'm really sorry. I'm so, so sorry and I swear, I will never forget something like that ever again. I was wrong and I should have been there for you," it's not enough and he knows it.

"This has been the hardest year for me. I thought at least I had you. That we had each other," she breaks down into tears. Lucas sees an opportunity to comfort her and wraps his arms around her.

"Are you having fun?" Eleven asks Will. He seems a little off to her.

"Me? Oh yeah, I'm fine," he brushes off her concern. Mike glances over at him quickly to see how he's doing. He was always good at reading his emotions. Two summers ago, Mike was the only friend at the hospital to see what Will went through. He could tell he was tense.

"You sure because it looks like you're sweating. Do you need to go outside?" he asks him.

"Mike, I'm fine, really," Will smiles, but neither one believes him.

Mike nods his head trying to get into the music, but stops. "Hey, do you want to go change the music? It sounds like super annoying Euro-trash."

"I can't tell the difference," Dustin comments. Mike gives him a look so Dustin will follow him to the DJ.

"Okay, okay geez," Dustin grumbles.

Will sees that he's been left alone with El and shifts uncomfortably.

"Hey, friends don't lie remember," she smiles at him. "You're safe here," she puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

Ms. Byers is the closest person to a mother El has ever had. After what happened to Hopper, Joyce took care of El as fiercely as she took care of Will and Jonathan. She made sure she had a home with love and whatever support she needed to get through the first few months without her dad. Because of that, Will felt like the brother she never had. At the school, everyone assumed they were brother and sister, and they didn't bother to correct them. It made the transition easier having a piece of home and someone who knew their shared history.

"I just got a weird feeling before, but I think it was just old trauma."

"Trauma?" she asks.

"Yeah a scary pain or a situation that happened in the past—it sticks with you. I think I was just reminded of trauma and—" he loses his words and shakes his head. Eleven nods understandingly.

Although they weren't close friends when they were both living in Hawkins, they had to rely on each other when they moved away. They were both new freaks in town. In Hawkins, Mike had been the only one who talked directly to her. Will and Eleven didn't know they had anything in common when they moved away, but they learned. Besides keeping their thoughts to themselves and their feelings bottled up sometimes, they were both very good at being honest with as few words as possible. They needed this connection for her to deal with Hopper's death and Will to accept the changes to his life.

"Talk to me."

~A.N. SEVEN CHAPTERS if you're still reading THANK YOU! Leave comments of all reactions and theories for my fanfic thus far. TY :)

8. Chapter 8

Mike and Dustin flips through a stack of tapes. Mike switches the music twice before finding something good.

"Am I missing something?" Dustin wonders.

Mike peeks behind him and sees Eleven with her hand on Will's shoulder. After a beat, she turns to him and smiles. Mike stares. The two walk away silently.

"Something might be up with Will. Did he seem weird to you?"

"Will has always been a little weird, especially after everything. Why do you think something's wrong?" Dustin unconsciously lifts his hand to his neck the way Will did when he felt the Mind Flayer from the Upside Down was around.

"NO! No, nothing like that. That threat has been gone. I was just worried about him. Eleven is better at taking care of him than I am. I mean they live together."

"There's no reason to be jealous Mike," he puts his hand on his shoulder for moral support. "You know they're like brother and sister."

"I know that!" Mike shakes him off. "I'm saying it because I don't think I know how to take care of Will or, like, let him know that he's okay."

"I'm pretty sure the best way to help someone is just to let them talk it out. That's what I do with Suzie, you just let a person vent when they need to."

"What does Suzie have to vent about?" Mike looks at him incredulously.

"A lot of things!" Dustin cries defensively. "She's got a lot on her plate. She-" it doesn't matter what story he was about to start. He's surprised by the feeling of the floor shifting beneath him. The lights flicker for just a moment and the lamp, which had already been

tossed around by some jocks, rolls off the end table and smashes into a hundred pieces on the floor.

"Who dropped that?" Reggie yells. His feet are already wobbly so he doesn't notice the extra bounce of the floor around him. Mike scrunches his forehead confused. Dustin, already an expert, knows to panic.

"It's an earthquake!" he screams loudly and a couple of others at the party scream nervously. He grabs Mike and runs over to the front door.

"What are you doing?!"

"The threshold—you have to stand underneath a threshold! It's the strongest part of the house!" he is still screaming at the top of his lungs. But what had been a hint of a tremor has already passed. The couples upstairs wouldn't have even noticed it on their beds and everyone else was content to say it was fluke. They look at Dustin and Mike and start laughing hysterically.

"Now look what you did," Mike grumbles.

"Sorry," Dustin smiles sheepishly.

The only empty room Eleven and Will can find on the first floor is the laundry. Will climbs on top of the washer since he is taller. Eleven would have tried to sit on the basket of clothes on the ground, but seeing him, she also jumps up to sit on the dryer next to him.

"I just think—" his sentence is cut off by the same rumbling. The machines shake beneath them and when the lights flicker they can see the plug spark and they jump off together. Just as quickly as it started, it's over.

"What was that?" Will asks. Eleven shakes her head not knowing. They hear some screaming from the living room followed by a lot of laughter.

"Is it over?" she asks cautiously.

"I don't know—I hope so?"

Lucas and Max are kissing. It's their first kiss in months.

Lucas had been holding on to Max as she cried it out. He was happy that she hadn't just sent him away. He probably would have sent himself away if the roles were reversed. As long as she didn't push him off, he continued to hold her. If this was all he could do, then he would do it for forever. He didn't know what she would tell him when she finally got control of herself again.

Eventually she tilted her head so it was not in her arms. Her cheeks were drenched and her eyes were red and wet. She would have said something like *I'm such a mess* if she could form words but that was too much work and not worth the effort.

He took a chance and kissed her cheek. He wiped away some of the tears. Max was looking at him a certain way. Lucas didn't want to chance it. He kept it simple and kissed her other cheek and wiped away some tears. She continued to stare. Lucas inched—hoping that he was doing what she wanted and not selfishly thinking for himself. He kissed her. She had to take a breath because she hadn't gotten a hold of her emotions yet. In the interim, she put her arms around his neck and hugged him. Lucas scooted so they were comfortable. It felt good to be next to her again like this.

"I'm sorry, Max. I'm really—" she kissed him again firmly. He stopped talking.

Then, the birds, which were mostly quiet in that area at night, started chirping wildly. A wind blew around them and the grass beneath their feet started shaking. They stopped and looked around them. They heard something shatter in the house and a bunch of screaming. They looked at each other confused. Lucas jumped up first and gave her his hand. He helped pull her up and she rocked into him. His arm fell naturally on her waist. They stared at each other for a moment, then heard a bunch of loud laughing. They ran into the house.

~A.N. DUN DUN! Something is happening in Hawkins. What else is new?

Stay tuned for more interesting unraveling drama!

~A.N. The Stranger Things boys' friendships are so fun. They are great with each other. I'll make sure to include some Elmax scenes later on too. Leave a comment if you're happy with Lumax getting back together! :)

9. Chapter 9

"El, are you okay?" Mike asks when he busts open the door and sees her standing with Will.

"Yes!" she gives him a squeeze. Mike looks relieved.

"Mike, what was that?" his friend questions him.

"Dustin thinks it was an earthquake," he says shaking his head. He clearly wants nothing more to do with him. "We got to get out of here."

"Where's Lucas and Max?" El asks.

"We'll find them," he says, heading into the hallway. The music hasn't started back up again. So, the laughing follows Mike. He leads the way out a passing out a side door with the two. El and Will look at each other and wonder what the others could be laughing about.

"Why are they laughing?"

"Ask Dustin," he spits not in the mood. They end up in the bushes on the side of the house and have to walk out a narrow stone path to reach the sidewalk. They are crossing the street when they see Troy and his friends by Mike's car. "Oh sh-!"

"Well, well, look who we have here—the geeks!"

"What did you do to my car?!" Mike's eyes widen and his mouth falls open when he sees the giant gash on the side and the dent on the hood.

"Oh, that wasn't me, that was that little shake that just happened. Rotten luck dude!" he hoots like a harpy. His friends all chime in. Mike balls his hands into fists.

Dustin runs from across the street. He'd been taking the brunt of the laughter while Mike got their friends out of the house.

"Start the car!" he now yells running out. The party crowd files after

him like a wave. When he gets to the side of the car, he sees Troy and responds the same Mike. "OH SHIT!"

"Get away from my car! We're leaving," Mike steps in front of his friends.

"Where's your friend Luke? I was hoping to talk to him again."

"It doesn't matter. None of this matters! Now will you get off my car."

"I think I'm gonna stay here until he comes out actually. I figure you're his ride and I'm sure he'll need to come save your ass."

"We don't need saving. We have her!" Dustin shouts a little too confidently. El panics and shows Dustin her hands, waving them in a way that says she has nothing.

"Fuck I forgot!"

"Oh potty-mouth, what did you say she was going to do again? Is she your secret weapon?" all his friends laugh. "I don't think so," he takes a step forward.

Mike blocks him with his body. He won't let him get any closer to his friends. Will, not much of a defense, also takes a step forward. Dustin puts up his hands ready to try a move he saw on a boxing game he played in the arcade. If he does it right, he typically gets a KO.

"Hey, leave them alone!" Lucas runs out of the house and races across the street. "What are you doing here Troy? Take your friends and get out of here."

"LUKE! There you are," the two begin to stare each other down. "Where's Max?" he asks him simply. Lucas holds himself very still. Troy catches the slightest twitch. "Where is she?!"

"I'm right here," Max passes through the crowd. She doesn't let her face show anything.

"Are you coming with me or are you staying here with these losers?" They pause. He waits. She walks up to him. She looks back at Mike first and notices his keys bunched up in his fist. She looks at El, Will

and Dustin who look worried for her. She looks last at Lucas trying to get him to understand. She takes a step forward and spins around as if to show her side.

"Max..." Dustin sighs betrayed.

"I think I feel much better about this whole thing now. So sorry about your car, terrible accident," he takes several steps away with his friends and Max.

They all stare after their friend. Although they're free to enter the car and leave, they take a second just in case. Mike calls it and opens the front door. Lucas waits the longest. He isn't holding out hope. He thinks he knows something, but he can't be sure until it happens.

"LUCAS!" Dustin yells out the car window.

The rest of them have just about filed in. The party crowd and Troy's gang hang outside the front of the house. Max stands a half inch in front of Troy. Lucas steps into the car last. The car pulls out of the driveway and onto the street. It makes the slowest of turns down the one-way cul-de-sac, still waiting to see. Max makes a movement. Lucas puts a hand on Mike's shoulder to stop the car. Max, meanwhile, stomps on Troy's toes and elbows him in the stomach.

"We're over, asshole," she says and runs to the car. Lucas, sensing her coming, opens the door for her.

"Welcome back!" Will grins approvingly.

"That was brilliant!" Mike smiles hitting his steering wheel excitedly.

"You dumped his ass!" El giggles hysterically.

"Mad Max! Mad Max!" Dustin yells.

By the time Troy regains his breath, their car has completely sped away! They all scream and laugh loudly. Lucas kisses Max happily.

END OF PART 1

STAY TUNED! The party scene is technically over so let's see where this goes and how it expands :) Thanks for reading this far!

10. Chapter 10

PART 2: The Earthquake

"Oh God, I'm so screwed when my dad sees the car," Mike groans.

After the immediate rush had passed, he started thinking about the damage Justin and his goons did to his car. He knows his dad will never trust him with a car until he ships him off to college. He'll probably get an even older car or he'll be riding a bike until he's 30.

"It doesn't look that bad, really," Will tries to be supportive. Mike gives him a look through the rear-view mirror. Eleven is sitting directly behind Mike with Will in the middle. Max sits on Lucas's lap near the passenger side door. Dustin was first to call shotgun. Mike shakes his head distractedly as he continues driving.

"Where are we even going?" Max asks.

"I'm dropping everyone off at home," Mike responds assuredly. The whole car makes a collective cacophony of disapproving sounds. *No way!* and *Oh, come on!* "Do you guys have a better plan? I have an old, and now, beat-up car and no place to host a party. I think the night is over!"

"Who said anything about a party? I need to get my equipment," Dustin responds seriously.

"What equipment? What are you talking about?" the car is silent as Mike interrogates Dustin.

"The earthquake," Dustin turns around to everyone sitting behind him. No one responds as they avoid his gaze. "Come on—you all felt it. This is the phenomena I've been studying for weeks—months. That was just the start. There's bound to be more."

"I don't think soil collections are going to be useful right now," Will interrupts thinking of his last conversation with Dustin.

"Who said anything about soil collection? I'm thinking we go to the source," Dustin's mouth trips over the s- sound.

"The source! Dustin, we just got laughed out of a party of high schoolers. Do you even know what you're talking about?" Mike answers annoyed.

"Yes, I know what I'm talking about! We can all be in grave danger!"

"Look man, I know I felt something happen and it was pretty weird, but I'm pretty sure it passed," Lucas adds.

"Exactly Lucas! There's no need to get all geeky on something that doesn't exist," Mike says.

"Well, I'm with Dustin. I know earthquakes. I'm *from* California," she says in a tone that shows she is the one to be trusted. "They don't tend to just be solo events. Also, why would they even be happening in a place like Hawkins?" Max counters them.

"Thank you, Max," Dustin smiles. Max, who quickly readjusted to being with them, pats him on the shoulder. "All in favor of getting some answers, say *aye*!" he says too confidently. Max chomps her teeth together awkwardly. Dustin realizes he may have taken it too far.

"I want to know too," Will inserts seriously. Eleven stares at him curiously. "The earthquake was just—I have a weird feeling about it."

"What are you saying?" Mike probes him through the mirror. Will is quiet.

"What do you mean?" Eleven asks him gently.

"I don't know. I can't really explain it, but I think we should check it out." The car is silent now for a different reason.

"The gate is closed. That's all over," Lucas, the voice of reason, says breaking the silence on a tense topic. Once he mentions the gate, it all becomes very real.

"I don't—I'm not saying it's that, but—"

"Mike, we should check it out," Eleven decides. She is going with her gut, or more importantly Will's gut.

"What are we going to do if we actually find something?" Max asks.

"It can be dangerous," Mike makes eye contact with El's reflection in the mirror.

"El, you never got your powers back, right?" Dustin asks. More silence. Eleven feels uncomfortable as they all look at her. She would be their only way of defeating whatever it is, if it was something that needs defeating.

"No," she says curtly. There is an even longer pause.

"Look guys, I never said there would be fighting involved. I'm thinking we should just find out the source of the earthquake to warn others before it happens again."

"What if it was just a normal earthquake? Don't you think they'll have professionals looking into it?" Lucas asks.

"Do you actually trust our government? Or whatever organization they have to look into it? They cover things up all the time. They probably wouldn't even tell us. They'll keep it out of the big newspapers and forget it ever happened," Max states logically. Lucas stays quiet.

"UGH! Fine, Dustin, you win," Mike groans. "Where are we going?"

"We'll need some equipment from back at my house first," Dustin smiles. "And then, the Quarry."

~A.N. Earthquakes in Hawkins? Seems fishy to me. I don't know how this idea first came to mind for me, but it will find it's grounding in what we are very familiar with from Stranger Things: the Upside Down and the Gate TEASER!

~A.N. I love writing Eleven and Will. They're precious and I would love to see their brother-sister relationship in Season 4. I assume it will be there but too soon to tell. Leave a comment on what relationship you're excited to see in S4. :)

11. Chapter 11

"Hi Tews!" Max says going straight to pet Dustin's cat who's perched on the table in the center of Dustin's living room.

"Come along, we have other more important things to do then play with the cat!" Dustin insists, clearly on a mission.

"I'm just showing him some love—geez!" Max rolls her eyes at Dustin being bossy.

"Keep it moving," he shuffles her away. "Now I need some things from my room and also from the storm shelter. You guys can do that," he says grabbing a set of keys off the wall and handing it to Eleven.

"Where's your mom, Dustin?" Lucas asks.

"I don't know? Probably sleeping, just don't make a lot of noise—we get in and get out, got it? I told Mike and Will to leave the car running." They split up. Dustin heads to his room while the other three head out the back door.

"Hey, so um," Mike starts, but he doesn't know what he's going to say.

"What is it?" Will asks. They're both leaning on the side of the car parked out on the street in front of Dustin's house. It's really quiet and they can follow the path of their friends as the lights turn on and off in his house.

"How have you been?"

"Good, I guess," Will shrugs confused by how Mike is acting and what he isn't saying.

"We haven't, you know, talked in a while."

"You're busy. You have Eleven," Will says kindly as way of explanation. Mike makes a face in the air.

"Yeah, I just feel like it's my fault we don't talk," he waits for a

response, but Will takes a long time. "Crap, it is my fault, isn't it?" Mike groans again.

"It's not that big of a deal! I'm really not bothered by it, seriously," Will tries his best not to make anyone to feel bad.

"No, it's so, so bad. I'm sorry I've been a lousy friend. I just realized with El, like she knows how to talk to you better than I do, and she's probably your best friend now and I'm just—"

"Mike, look with El and I—she's like my sister. And I'm really happy that she's my sister," he says with a grin. "After everything that happened, we just became close."

"I'm happy about that. I'm not—I'm not jealous of anything."

"You're jealous?!" Will picks up on the last thing.

"No! It's good! I don't think it's weird—I know that," Mike becomes more awkward as he attempts to find words. They take a moment to process everything.

"You're still my best friend Mike. I'm glad to be home," Will smirks, and after a moment, they give each other an awkward hug.

"He said what was in here?" Max looks around the creepy dark room.

"Wading gear, fire extinguisher, non-perish-able food items, emergency first aid kit, tool box, booster cables..." El said reading off the long list.

"How many people does he think we are?" Max wonders out loud.

"Why did we need two people to stay with the car? It could have been one person—it's a beat-up piece of junk anyway—no offense," Lucas offers to El since it is her boyfriend's car.

"It's junk," she absentmindedly agrees while looking at the contents on the shelves. She finds the box titled *'Emergency Preparedness for SERIOUS Emergencies: Fires and Earthquakes'*. "This looks important," she points to the box. They give each other looks.

~A.N. I can totally see Dustin wanting everyone to stay focused on his plan and really taking charge about something he cares about. He has grown so much. He was a "dingus" in Season 1-2. Season 3 he really grew so much and it's fun to write a character who gets into so many interesting situations. Of course he's the guy studying earthquakes and is the one who has boxes of Emergency gear. Leave a comment on favorite moments with Dustin throughout the show. One-liners too! TY :)

12. Chapter 12

Dustin races down the hall and quietly slides open, then shut, the door to his room. He turns on the lamp and quickly gathers a backpack, filling it with pens and pencils. He takes a giant pinned map of Hawkins off the wall beside his bed and digs into his desk drawer for a math compass for drawing circles. He takes his walkie *and* his backup walkie from under his bed and a whole package of new double A batteries—he is not planning on having a repeat of last time.

Just as he is going to leave, he remembers that although Suzie may not be awake and will possibly hate him for a completely different reason, he needs to know what her seismograph, 1,508 miles away, looks like. He needs to figure out the epicenter.

"Suzie, do you copy?" No response. "Suzie, I know it's late and you're mad at me, but I need to know about your seismogram. I don't know if you felt it too, but I'm going to check mine now. Suzie, do you copy? Suzie! SUZIE, DO YOU COPY?"

"Dustin, I copy! Please stop talking for a second... Now, what do you want? Over."

"I-need-to-know-the-reading-on-your-seismogram-OVER!"

"What?"

"There was an earthquake. Please Suzie, I need your help. Over."

"You always need my help, but you never give me anything I want."

"Suzie, that's not true! I'll make it up to you with whatever you want tomorrow. I don't have time right now. We're going down to Sattler's Quarry to figure out what's going on in Hawkins, but I need your seismogram reading to confirm my data points—over!"

"You better make it good... I have to check my seismograph in the backyard—you know it's very late here. Over."

"Thank you so much Suzie-poo! I'll be on the other end the whole

time. Over."

"I'm not scared Dustin. I am very self-sufficient. Over," she says

While she is silent on her end, he races around his room again and finds his protective hockey gear. *It might come in handy...*

"How much stuff—just hold up will you?" Mike insists, defensively looking out for his car. Lucas and Max drop the box not so delicately into the trunk. *Oh fu-*, he mutters to himself.

"Your piece of scrap metal will be fine," Max retorts. He gives her a look.

"Do you mind helping us out here?" Lucas asks his friend annoyedly. "We still have like another box and a half of really heavy stuff to carry up from Dustin's pit of hell. I don't scare easy and that thing is dark and creepy."

"Wait, where's El?" he asks nervously. Max turns to make a gesture, but the fright in Mike's eyes cloud judgment and he runs through the bushes to get to the backyard faster. "SHIT!"

El is climbing out of the storm shelter with a fire extinguisher in her arms like a small child. She's surprised by Mike who looks out of breath.

"EL!" he calls down.

"What's wrong?"

"I—I just wanted to make sure you were alright... and to help you with this!" he says taking the extinguisher from her. She looks at him confused. "How, um, bad is it down there?"

"Not bad," she looks him in the eye, "You were scared for me?" He balks under her gaze. "Mike, I'm not scared of the dark," she pauses and thinks. "Are you?"

"No, of course not!" he laughs her off. "I just—you weren't out here," he points with one hand, "and they said it was creepy so—"

"—You were scared for me," she smiles at him. "Here. Take this," she gives him the toolbox too. "Can you handle it?" she asks him. He nods silently, gratefully. She grabs whatever is left on the floor and then closes the doors behind her.

~A.N. Suzie will get better scenes I promise. It's fun to include her sassiness though and this is all happening in one night so, of course, she isn't happy. She is really great match for Dustin though. I don't know how they're going to go long distance in the show but I hope we see more of her. Leave comments on our favorite star-crossed lovers Dusty-bun and Suzie-poo! :)

~A.N. There has been a lot of talk about Mike being overly protective of El. I don't want to open a can of worms, but what do we think of this scene? Good boyfriend? Or over the top? I'm curious to hear...

13. Chapter 13

"Okay so what's in Sattler Quarry that's so special?" Mike asks Dustin now that they're all back on the road.

"Well you know from Mr. Clarke's Earth science class that all earthquakes are caused by the Earth's tectonic plates rubbing together and eventually breaking due to pressure," Dustin quickly summarizes.

"Yeah sure," Mike nods. That's the obvious stuff he already knows.

"Well when I started studying seismology—the study of earthquakes —" he directs at Eleven and Max—the less obvious nerds of the group. Eleven doesn't notice the slight. Max, meanwhile, shoots him a look showing him she doesn't appreciate getting called out.

"I know what seismology means Dustin!"

"Alright, alright—calm down. What was I saying? Great, now I forgot!"

"Seismology, earthquakes..." Mike interrupts.

"Right, so, I built my own machine for measuring the movement of the ground and left it hidden there. Suzie gave me the instructions actually. She's pretty amazing." Dustin smiles and makes sure that his radio is on for this. Suzie, however, doesn't respond, indicating she probably isn't listening. After she confirmed her data with him, she said not in quite so many terms that she was going back asleep and not to bother her again unless it was something major.

"We're not going to have to repel down a rock wall, aren't we?" Mike scrunches his nose.

"We said no danger," Will interrupts.

"Because I really don't want to end up freefalling there again," Mike continues his thought. Through the rearview mirror, he locks eyes with El. He remembers how she saved him from a grim fate 3 years ago when she caught with her powers after he jumped to protect

friend Dustin from Troy and James. El gives him a half-smile back.

"No one said anything about freefalling! It's just a hike. Oh, that reminds me," Dustin digs through his backpack at his feet and, beaming, he pulls out several road flares.

"What are those for?" Max asks.

"Well, first of all they're awesome! Second, I'm sure we'll find a need for them at some point," Dustin looks for affirmation from Lucas who is the king at blowing things up after firing fireworks at the Mind Flayer. He smiles back at Dustin approvingly. Max rolls her eyes.

Suddenly, the car lurches.

Everyone holds on to each other as the car leaps over an out-of-place road bump. The old car makes a snapping noise when the bumper slams against the road. Mike breaks immediately. Inside the car there are a several frightened reactions and bruises.

"What was that?" Eleven asks breathlessly.

"Is everyone okay?" Mike looks back at everyone.

"Is there a school here I don't know about? Some kind of school zone or something?" Dustin says. Mike stares at the bump in the road through his side-view mirror just as Dustin sticks his head out the window to look back.

"Dustin, do you copy? I heard screaming. Over," Suzie asks.

"Yes, I copy, Suzie. We're alright. Over. I think I see something..." he says while getting out of the car.

Mike follows him. The rest file out after them. It isn't a paved-in road bump. The fold in the ground is formed from the pressure of two parts of the pavement being forced together. It brings up a slew of small rocks that look like ice cream cake crumbs.

"What happened here?" Will asks.

"This looks really bad," Mike says. It doesn't just take up a part of the

road. It seems to spread into the trees on both sides. Mike is shocked he didn't see it coming.

"What would happen if we followed it?" Max who has been quiet up until now asks.

"Heck no! We are not wandering through the woods to see where it ends!" Lucas stops her immediately. The woods are extremely dark. It's sometime after 10pm and after everything that has been going on, they are not prepared for any unheeded danger, he reminds her quickly. Dustin points his flashlight in the direction of the woods.

"We're not that far from the Quarry actually... it shouldn't be more than a quarter of mile in that direction..." he comments.

"We're not walking in the woods. I'm not leaving the car on the side of the road with a bunch of weird stuff in the trunk. Can we all just get *more sane* and just go back to the car?" Mike is close to the edge and can see himself losing it completely if they don't listen.

"Also, guys, you don't know what's out there. We're better off going the way we know," Will says reasonably.

"THANK YOU!" Lucas bursts out and marches back to the car.

Dustin lights a road flare and puts it down near the side of the road to draw attention to the bump in case another car passes over it blindly. Max and Dustin are the last to follow looking off into the woods curiously.

~A.N. Lucas always has a handle on reality and is least likely to get himself killed accidentally in this show. Leave a comment on the strongest survivor of the Party.

~A.N. Will is still very important for keeping them in touch with what happened in the Upside Down. I like that I can write him as that link so if he says something, the others are likely to listen to him.

14. Chapter 14

Mike parks the car in an alcove where families who picnic leave their vehicles.

"Alright, does everyone have a flashlight?" Mike looks around at the group to confirm that they're all holding working flashlights.

"Okay so it's not a far walk, but we need to be extra careful of rock slides. We get my machine and the reading from the earthquake and we return to the car. Simple mission. If you see something—anything—out of the ordinary, don't go alone. Stay with the group. This is very important," Dustin says seriously. He makes eye contact with each of them. They nod their heads in agreement. "Huddle is over. Let's get moving!"

It takes exactly 3 minutes for the group to break up.

Will, Max and Lucas let the others walk ahead choosing to toss rocks into the still water. Max's rock skips further than Will's in the water, but Lucas's trumps them both. His makes an extra three skips before vanishing into the lake. He smirks. Max fights him playfully for showing off.

He doesn't mind her pretending to fight with him when it's like this. It almost seems as if they're back to old times—the part that both of them can agree was always good. He grabs her in his arms as she tries to run away after doling out a hit to his chest. She folds her body as he scoops her from behind. They laugh for a moment before he lets her go.

Max never saw the Quarry up-close. Walking to the side, she admires the scaling rock wall formations that in the dark seem impossibly tall. Her hands feel the roughness of the stone. The birds seem to blend into one soothing sound that bring a quiet peacefulness. Taking full breaths of the fresh air, she can see why people would visit here. If she wasn't already wired, she could fall asleep near the bank of water. In the morning she'd be content to stay a little longer. She might even take a dip. She mentally promises herself that she will do

this someday. If she invites Lucas... well, maybe she will.

While Max has the luxury of a calm, thoughtful moment, Lucas has a lot more trauma on his mind. He already told Max the story about Will. How the "bad men," supposedly, collected Will's body from the lake 3 years ago and how Dustin, Lucas, Mike and El watched when it happened. He thought that his best friend was gone forever. Standing there now, he can't help but think about the sick feeling he had then. It still gives him the creeps even after all this time. The feeling never goes away. He rubs his sneaker into the dirt, which is more like gravel. He shivers and looks around realizing he has no idea where Dustin, Mike and El may have gone.

Will is quiet as he skips rocks by himself without all the competition. He might have been thinking about the same time too, but obviously his memory would be very different. He never went to the Quarry and he didn't know his friends were looking for him. In the dark, he didn't know where to find his friends. The Upside Down was oppressive. He thought he was going to die there. He never thought anyone would find him before the monster got to him. The last year has been hard, but still nothing compared to the horror of being stuck in the Upside Down and then being a prisoner of the Mind Flayer trapped in his own body after he got back. He didn't like to think about these things, but something about this place at night reminded him about what his life was like; he wouldn't wish it on anyone.

He skips a stone as far as it will go, willing it away from his body. He is pleasantly surprised by how strong his arms are when he focuses. Almost cheerful, he peers to his side where he last saw his friends hoping they saw it too, but when he looks to where his two friends were, he doesn't see them anymore.

"Guys?" he asks aloud. "GUYS!" he yells a little more frantically.

~A.N. Will has always gotten the short end of the stick. I really hope things will work out for him in season 4. He deserves it. His friends should pay more attention to him. Unfortunately, according to what we've seen so far, the characters are pretty likely to walk away from him. So sorry Will! Leave a comment if you think he deserves to be treated better in S4. :)

15. Chapter 15

Dustin keeps pace alongside Mike and El. The couple keep their flashlight beams facing forward, and with their free hand, they grip each other tightly as they walk in the dark. Dustin looks back at them once. Eleven takes the opportunity to talk to him.

"How's Suzie?" Eleven asks him.

"She's good. Sleeping," Dustin looks at his walkie, which has the light off, indicating he isn't transmitting a signal to her anymore.

"Have you gone to Utah to visit?"

"No not yet, I was actually planning a trip this summer, but I think Suzie might decide to be a camp counselor for Camp Know Where so I'll just wait and see what she's up to."

"Oh okay," Eleven accepts what he says with a nod. Dustin knows the right thing to do is ask a question about her since she was making conversation with him.

"How are you liking high school?" he asks her with a smile.

"Not much," she fakes a smile. It is hard for her to talk about it. "It's weird. Very weird, even the teachers. School is pretty hard, and math-math is the hardest," she pauses. "I'm getting better though and Will helps me in science class. We're lab partners," she ends positively. Dustin beams.

"Awesome! Yeah man, we miss both of you around here. High school is..." Dustin just makes an uncomfortable face. El laughs. Mike huffs too.

After a moment Dustin realizes where he is.

"Hey, it's this way!" he says turning directions and walking quicker to the left. Mike and Eleven follow behind. Dustin dips into a small cave and disappears aside from the glow emitting from his flashlight. They finally realize their pack has broken up significantly. They look at each other panicked and then chase after Dustin. With their

flashlights aimed in the opposite direction, they hope their friends will see, and follow, the light.

After squeezing through the suffocating entrance, they see Dustin has already got his flashlight in his mouth and he is leaning over a wooden box with confusing motor attached to it and white paper and a pen dangling inside. Before they can tell him the bad news about their friends, he asks them to direct their light so he can take down some measurements. He takes out the maps from his bag, a ruler, a pencil and a notebook to quickly scratch some notes. They watch in confusion. He grunts and sighs, but eventually, he seems to have what he needs.

"This is amazing! Absolutely amazing!" his smile beams. Eleven is confused but smiles with him. His radiant teeth-filled smile disappears when he realizes the others aren't with them. "Hold up! Where is everyone?"

"That's what we were going to say," Mike begins, sounding very rational, just as—

A second earthquake strikes. Way more forceful than the last.

"GET OUT! Get out-get out-get out!" Dustin repeats as they all make a break for the only exit. They each pass out of the cave. Eleven first covering her head with her arms, followed by Dustin who Mike pushes to get out ahead of him, and finally Mike who gets hit with a small rock to the face that makes his cheek bleed almost immediately. They are all just shy of getting trapped inside as a rush of rocks in a grayish white cloud of dust falls over them that's visible even in the dark. It reminds Dustin of that scene in Raiders of the Lost Ark.

Unfortunately, the earthquake isn't over just because they left the cave. It is still rumbling underneath them and sloshing around the water in tall waves. It shakes them aggressively. They slowly attempt to get up. While Eleven tries getting to her feet, she loses her footing and Mike's body bends as he tries to stop her from going down on the floor which is shaking up the loose gravel around them and smacking at their bodies.

Dustin puts the box machine, dancing messily in arms, down, but he is still holding onto everything else he brought with him, except for his stash of batteries which roll into the gravel and get washed away by the flowing water.

"Sh-I-i-tTTT" he says rumbling out the word with the vibration of their body.

By now, Will has caught up to his friends.

When the first tremor strikes, Lucas and Max hit the ground almost immediately. Trying to control themselves while they are on their knees, they roll onto their sides facing each other to protect their faces. Will is still trying to stand although the rumbling makes it extremely difficult. Max, peeking out through her crimson hair, sees him and lifting herself up against the pull and shaking ground around her, yanks him down to their level.

There is no screaming as they hold their breath and keep their eyes shut waiting for it to end. In a final rush of defiance, the typically still lake forces a tsunami over their heads that takes the three by surprise drenching them with no warning.

~A.N. Thanks for reading! :) I'm trying to have as many character interactions as possible. Dustin and El are super underrated. I loved when they met again in episode 7 of season 3. Leave a comment about which friend pairings are your favorite!

16. Chapter 16

Dustin's machine now on the ground seems to be back at work measuring the earthquake. The other two see it moving in real time. It seems to be an endless thirty seconds of pulsing before it slows down and everything seemingly becomes still again. Eleven doesn't realize she is screaming until the noise of nature rattling itself seizes. They each take a breath. Nothing much has changed around them although the water looks white and bubbly.

Mike and El get up first and retrace their steps to meet up with their missing friends. Max, Lucas and Will are still recovering. Sitting up, they're panting heavily and getting water out of their nostrils. Their clothes are completely soaked through.

"Are you okay?" El asks putting a hand on Max's back.

"Yeah, just unlucky I guess," Max answers, noticing that the other two are dry. Lucas doesn't let Mike help him up.

"Where did you guys go? We were trying to catch up," Will questions them.

"Dustin got the reading he wanted. We just made it out of a cave with our lives," Mike replies.

"What? Where's Dustin?" he asks him.

"He's back there," Eleven answers and points her flashlight.

When they've all gotten to their feet, they march over as a group to the cave. Dustin is back to taking notes on his machine that was miraculously not damaged in the earthquake.

"Guys! You're alive!" he smiles happy to see them. "You wouldn't believe what I found," he looks pumped.

"We're alive no thanks to you and your stupid plans. We could have died!" Lucas yells at him. "You could have killed us!"

"Lucas, he didn't know we'd get stuck in an earthquake. You can't

blame him," Max tries placating him.

"We decided to come here as a group," Mike reminds him.

"'No danger' that's what he said! We wouldn't be putting ourselves in danger by coming out here. And you're telling me Dustin had no clue another earthquake would strike while we were out here on his stupid mission. He's the expert!"

"I don't know when earthquakes are going to strike! How would I know that?" Dustin defends himself.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. Just go back to your stupid reading, what does your box even say?" Lucas asks Dustin obviously pissed off.

"It's not stupid; it's science!" he retorts, getting up to fight. Will and Eleven place their bodies in front of Dustin while Mike and Max block Lucas. The boys push against their friends and manage to get a couple of hits in.

"Guys, guys, cut it out!" Mike insists.

"Stop fighting! Stop it!" Will yells.

"You're being really dumb right now!" Max, who is tired of all the BS, observes. She gets Lucas's attention with that, and he stands down although obviously resistant to withdrawing. He breathes heavily and then turns on his foot to get some space. She doesn't go to comfort him. "What did you find Dustin?"

Dustin doesn't speak. He is still baffled by Lucas. He shakes his head and goes back to the machine.

"I got the reading from the first earthquake and this one. I'm not entirely sure I know what's happening, but I have a theory. The first reading shows an aftershock in the vicinity of the New Madrid, Missouri along the seismic zone. So, originally what we felt reached us from 300 miles away. It was a big one for sure, but not too close to us here. What I think happened is that first one triggered a another one here in Hawkins."

"It came from here? It started here?" Mike questions him.

"What does that mean?" El asks.

"It's like a current, or a slingshot. The first earthquake is the rock being placed in the slingshot, juicing it up. The second is the pull back and aim. The third—that's the release. The first earthquake might have triggered the response here, but if I'm right, then there's one more coming and that one is going to be way, way worse. What we felt might have been a 5 or 6 on the Richter scale. The next will be at least a 7 or 8; up to 200 times more powerful."

"How will the town survive that?" El asks.

"It might not," Dustin responds earnestly.

"Is there anything we can do?" Will asks.

"The earthquake will happen here whether we do anything or not. The best we can do is warn everyone and somehow get everyone to evacuate their homes in 48 hours."

"You're giving us *48 hours*?" Mike panics.

"These things happen quickly. Science doesn't play around."

"It seems like it's playing a game with us right now," Mike snaps back.

"So, what are we going to do?" Will asks. He has no intention of going home at 6am for the bus ride out if he's leaving his friends in danger. He doesn't need El to speak to know she feels the same way. Hawkins weirdly enough always has been and always will be home. And their friends need them.

"Guys, there's one more thing I forgot to mention..." Dustin adjusts his cap and then his collar.

"Forgot to mention or chose not to admit?" Max looks at him pensively.

"The second earthquake marks the whole town as one wide epicenter, but the center is slightly shifted south to, uh, Hawkins Laboratory."

~A.N. Finally we get the connection between all the crazy stuff that has been going on and the laboratory. We'll see how this goes. Thanks for reading and let me know in the comments how you like it so far! TY :)

17. Chapter 17

"Are you sure you want to head home right now? I'm actually thinking it might be best if we keep this going overnight and come up with a plan," Mike polls the group as they walk back to the car.

"I'm going home. My parents probably think something terrible happened to me. You know yours are probably worrying about the same thing. The party is definitely over," Lucas insists.

"Once we get home, they'll try to keep us locked in. If Dustin's right, we all need to leave Hawkins," Max responds to him.

"I'm exhausted. I need to go home and rest. I'll convince my mom to pack up the car in the morning and get out of town for a bit," Dustin yawns and stretches.

"You can't be serious! It's not going to be that easy Dustin," Max says.

"You don't know that. All of you should do that actually. Go home, kiss your mom, and make sure when the sun rises in the morning your family is busting out of here."

"Not everyone is going to leave, even if you tell them that another earthquake is coming. They won't believe it will be worse. You know how people here are," Max protests.

"Exactly! We need to find out what's going. If it started underneath the lab, it might be the government again or the Russians or something worse!" Mike exclaims.

"We can't fight *any* of those things. We're not qualified," Lucas reminds them. "We go home! We pick up the pieces and leave here in the morning."

They hear a cracking noise to their left and all of them shoot their heads over to look as a sturdy tree loses its bearings, snaps in half and comes tumbling down to their side. It misses them by all by several feet. Dustin screams the loudest. His mouth opening wide to see all of his adult teeth and some of his baby teeth as well. They all

jog back to the car a little bit faster.

"You sounded excited about what was happening Dustin," El states when they're back in the car. She got shotgun this time so she turns around to see him in the middle squashed on Max and Will's lap.

"No, no, I wasn't excited about the earthquakes happening. I'm just proud of myself for figuring it out," his head hits the roof of the car as they gently pass over the road bump with a lit flare near the end of its fuse.

All of a sudden, police sirens wail behind them.

"What did you do?" Dustin exclaims. El looks to Mike nervously.

"I didn't do anything. We didn't do anything wrong. Everyone just be calm, will you?" he answers and pulls over.

An officer exits the car and their shadow and silhouette through the reflection in El's side mirror makes her heart leap. She can't help but think of Hopper. It seems like she loses track of time. She hardly hears what the officer is actually saying. She remembers his smile, the way his voice sounded when he was happy or when he was mad. Those were all triggers to a past she remembers was her own but feels disconnected from. The pain that had once filled her lungs making it difficult to breathe or talk or even concentrate returns in the presence of the uniform. Hawkins is her home because it was where she lived with Hopper. It's where she had her best and worst memories, but is always drawn to return. The memories she has make coming back so hard and heavy in her heart. She forces herself to think of something else. She returns to the present by catching on to Mike's voice.

"We're heading home now sir."

"What were you doing out this way anyway?"

"Nothing sir, we just took a drive. After that earthquake though, we thought it was best just to go home. That's what we're doing sir."

"Do your parents even know where you are?" The officer is new. El

doesn't recognize him. His badge says Carroll.

"No sir, and this is why we are all headed home," Mike can't help but let some agitation out. Why ask these dumb questions when the answers all come down to the same thing? Yes, I know it's late. Yes, I know there was an earthquake. I felt it and almost died. Yes, I'm going to be in trouble with my parents if I don't head home soon. Why are you making it more difficult by having me talk to you about it?

The only benefit of being pulled over comes a moment later when the officer's walkie talkie goes off.

"~10-70 back up requested on Cornwallis."

"10-4 Flo! Sorry kids, have a safe night. Get home!" he says and rushes back to his patrol car.

"She said Cornwallis?" Mike repeats.

"10-70? I think that means fire. Mike, that's on my street, go-go!" Dustin cries. Everyone's back tightens and arches. Mike stomps on the gas pedal. The patrol car speeds past them on their left side leading the way.

~A.N. Big plans ahead! At least 3 more chapters to end this Part!

~A.N. A musical inspiration in the next bit of writing that I recommend to everyone : Good Things Fall Apart by Jon Bellion- the stripped version is better :)

18. Chapter 18

They can smell it before they see it. Burning wood, diesel fuel and ash like an extreme bonfire.

As they approach the corner of Mulberry and Cornwallis, the heavy black clouds indicate that something is burning. The whole town is camped out on the street. The police and fire trucks make it impossible to pass through. Mike quickly makes the next turn and goes down Cherry Street instead to get closer.

"I don't think it's your house Dustin," Will says craning his head out the window. Dustin notices it too.

"It looks like the Holland's old house," Mike notes. "Do you know who lives there now?" he asks no one in particular. They're all vaguely aware someone lives there now, but not even Dustin knows who.

Mike turns into the driveway of Max's home.

"Do you think your stepdad will mind if I park here for a minute?" he asks.

"It's your funeral," she says already jumping out of the car before it's fully parked. The rest follow her out. They run as close as close to the fire as the police enforced perimeter will allow.

The firefighters have not yet given up, but they don't seem to have the morale to stick to the end. They already know it's a hopeless cause. The house is going to crumble. The fire has not died down at all. As they watch, the glass in the front windows shatter from the thermal stress inside the house. The crowd collectively gasp and stand back. The police are loudly barking at the bystanders to back away in case it goes down in an explosion.

"Do you know if anyone was inside?" Max asks the nearest policeman.

"I don't know for certain, but no one was taken to the ambulance. I don't think there was anyone inside. It was probably that damn earthquake that started it. Their boiler, or what-not, exploded."

"Thanks!" she shouts. The emergency sirens are extremely loud, piercing the air and keeping the neighborhood awake.

Max looks behind her carelessly and sees her mom and stepdad in the front door of her house. They make clear eye contact with her and she knows she's busted.

"Shitshitshitshit," she says in one breath.

Lucas looks behind him to where she was looking and is equally caught. Her parents don't like him very much from the few times they've seen him, but they also have no idea she is dating and she wants to keep it that way.

"I got to go! Mike, you may want to get your car out of the driveway before my stepdad hangs you," Max warns him and runs ahead. "Let me know what you decide to do tomorrow. I'll keep my radio on." Lucas gives her a knowing nod. Max smiles back at him.

"I'm going to walk home. My mom must be freaking out," Dustin says ducking under some police tape to take the short cut to his house just three doors down. "I'll talk to you guys tonight or tomorrow."

"Guess that leaves us..." Mike packs them all in his car and waves at Max's stepdad who is still standing in his front door. Mike keeps his head down, drives up Cherry Street and gets onto Maple Street. He stops to drop off Lucas. There is silence as he gets out.

"Look if we're going to do something tomorrow, I want to know about it. I'm sorry about today. I'll talk to Dustin. I may have overreacted."

"Maybe?" Will teases him.

"Go take a shower," Mike chuckles. Lucas still looks soggy.

Mike wishes there was a way he could park his car quietly in his own driveway; they're just far enough from all the hubbub surrounding the Holland's old home that he could attempt to be stealth, but his old jalopy won't allow it. It makes a sound like a dying whale when it sputters to a stop. His speedometer runs as if it ran ten thousand miles in under ten minutes, clinking and clacking before coming to a stop.

He knows his father would sleep through an alien invasion, but his mom might have stayed up waiting for him. He isn't thinking about Nancy ratting him out anymore because she's away at college. He prays to the god he sometimes visits in church when his parents are feeling extra religious that, just for tonight, his mom is not awake. He may have mentioned Will spending the night, but he never said anything about a girl. Just in case his mom is awake, he tells El to wait out front while he and Will head in. As he predicted, his mom is camped out in the hallway.

"Where have you been, Michael?"

~A.N. Introducing Mrs. Wheeler- I'm so excited. Leave a comments on your favorite mom :)

19. Chapter 19

"Michael, I want answers. Hello Will, so good to see you."

"Hello Mrs. Wheeler," Will greets her. Mike gives him a look and shakes his head. Will mouths *What?*

"There have been two earthquakes and a fire in our neighborhood. You should have been home after the first tremor. I have been worried sick," she keeps the righteous mom-anger for another minute or so before she breaks down and gives her son a hug. She brings in Will too for good measure. "I want you two in bed now!" Mike and Will nod furiously. They take a step to leave, but she isn't done yet. "I should tell you that those earthquakes terrified Holly. She's been waking up screaming every 30 minutes; I doubt she'll be sleeping tonight poor thing. They really frightened her."

Mike nods silently to his mother. He's not about to say anything that will make her more upset than she already is.

"I'm going to bed. We'll do pancakes in the morning if you're up for it. Make sure you take a shower. Will, honey, you're wet; is everything okay?"

"I got sprayed by a hose," Will replies quickly. It's a dumb excuse and he knows it. Will isn't a very experienced liar. Mike closes his eyes painfully. Karen lets it go and lifts her robe a bit as she heads up the stairs. Mike signals Will to walk right behind her and keep her going up to her bedroom. Mike backs up and opens the door for El. In the best synchronization they can muster in the dark with no practice, they walk two-by-two to his room. Once the door is locked, they can breathe a little bit.

"Your mom looks pretty calm. How are you going to get them to leave tomorrow?"

"Holly," Mike says immediately. El's brows purse together. "Holly doesn't want to be here right now. If I was 6 years old, I probably wouldn't want to stick around here either. Maybe I can convince my dad to take her away someplace far like Disney World."

"Good luck with that," Will smirks good-naturedly.

"What's Disney World?" El asks curiously.

"It's supposedly the 'happiest place on Earth'," Mike replies nonchalantly. El's eyes widen to this information.

"Where is it?" she asks him.

"Orlando, Florida. You know Disney, right?" she shakes her head. "Um... Mickey Mouse?" She breathes in and nods.

"I know Mickey."

"Yeah, it's an amusement park dedicated to him and some other characters. It's great for kids. She'll be happy there."

"Okay, that's great and all, but how are you going to convince your family to leave *you* behind?" Will asks. El is curious about his answer too.

"That's a little harder... So maybe Disney is a little unrealistic. I just need them to get out of town. Maybe I can get them to head East. What if I say that I'm going to drive my friends? We want to help Dustin deconstruct Cerebro, but we'll catch up."

"It might work, but there's a lot of holes."

"We'll figure it out as we go along. I'll get you two out of here early, like before my mom gets up. Your mom thinks you're going to be on the 6am bus. You'll need to call her at some point about why neither of you showed up at home."

"She's not going to like that," Will whispers.

"Tomorrow I'll drop both of you off at Will's house on Mirkwood since it was abandoned by the last owner."

"Wait, what?" Will asks.

"What you didn't know that? Some people in town got in their heads that the place was haunted or something and they moved out after

the holidays. It's been empty ever since."

All Will can say is, "Oh."

"It's better this way because now we can use it as a base."

"What about Hopper's place—the cabin? Do you know?" El asks him. The mood shifts as she mentions it.

"I don't think anyone else is living there and the cabin hasn't been mentioned. I think it's just..." *Abandoned*. He doesn't want to call it that though in case she has a bad reaction to it.

El understands. Joyce took her there to collect whatever stuff was left. They dug out all the files about her mother. She kept them in a trunk of her personal items. It shouldn't make much sense to cry over the skeleton left behind, but she's quiet about it anyway.

"You should tell the others about this plan. See if they can convince their families to head East too and at the same get them to believe we'll be following them when really, we're going to be going to the site of the earthquake," Will says. Mike thinks for a moment.

"I think I have a way that might work for everyone. Adults move in packs; they do what other adults tend to do. So really, we just need one to set a trend and invite the others. The question is, who is the weak link?"

~A.N. Oh boy, scheming teens gotta love it! Mike IS the master planner.

20. Chapter 20

Dustin ends his call with Mike with a lot of pressure of what he needs to do. He hates to do this to his mother who has already been through so much, but it's desperate times and it calls for desperate measures.

"Ma, I know with everything that's been crazy in the last 24 hours you really need to relax. Whatever you want ma, I'm here for you!"

"Oh Dustin, you really are too good for me," she says giving him a bruising kiss on his head. Her nerves are completely shot. She has locks on all the windows. The house is stifling.

"You know what will be great for us, a spontaneous trip! Haven't you been saying you want to get out of Hawkins?"

"I don't recall-"

"Sure you do, just last week you were talking about your cousin Randy in Pennsylvania. I've never even been there."

"Well I'm sure you'll get to go, honey."

"How about tomorrow?"

"DUSTIN!" she hoots with laughter.

"I'm not kidding mom; I don't want to stay in Hawkins with all these earthquakes and fires. It's so dangerous. Please it would mean a lot to me."

"Dustin," she says softly. He is selling it as best as he can with his puppy-dog eyes. "You are absolutely mad."

"Is that a yes?" he waits what seems like hours as she dissects his face. Eventually she miraculously agrees, and he has a plan for 6am. He radios Will, Mike and El to tell him his good news. Only three more families to go.

Lucas barges into his parents' room at around 2 in the morning complaining of a nightmare that another earthquake was coming. He has never looked so terrified in his life. After a long hug from his mother, they send him back to his room where he exasperatedly breaks his act.

In the other room his parents whisper about what, if anything, they should do. At 6am he will let them know that Dustin and his mom will be taking a drive out east to Pennsylvania. Lucas will have to push a bit, but he can bet that they'll be ready for a small mini-vacation with their kids.

Erica wants to know what her brother's game is, but he stays tight-lipped. He is not bringing his baby sister along with him.

Max knew she wouldn't get far if she complained that she was nervous about staying in Hawkins to her stepdad, but as much as he is a creep, he sometimes tries to be a good husband, and at the very least, he is sensitive to when his wife is frightened by something not caused by him.

Max lays awake in bed after she has learned the plan. She knows her mother will stop in her room to say goodnight one last time. That is when she will put the fear of god into her mother, relaying everything she has learned about seismology from Dustin to her mother.

Feigning tiredness, Max tucks herself before her mother can even lock the door. Her mother walks off with an uncertain nervousness. Max will casually bring up Dustin's trip in the morning and see if she takes the bait and convinces her husband to go on a trip.

Mrs. Wheeler is the hardest to fool because she has already been in this situation too many times to trust her son when he says he wants to leave. She straightforward asks him what his angle is, but he isn't about to deviate from the plan. If all the others can bald-face lie, then he can too—there is no rule saying, 'sons don't lie.' When it looked like his plan is failing, he realizes he may need to bring in his dad.

"But dad! Holly is scared and I'm scared. At least for her sake I think going along with Dustin's mom, the Sinclairs and the Hargroves is the right thing to do."

"The Hargroves are going?" Mrs. Wheeler's eyes bulge.

"Yes, it is completely unprecedented, but yes, even *they* are coming."

"Billy Hargrove's family, right?"

"You know him?" his eyes narrow on her. She shifts her shoulders casually.

"It was such a shame what happened to him. That terrible fire in the mall on the Fourth of July. It was such complete craziness... he was a great pool lifeguard," Mike rolls his eyes and feels uncomfortable, but he can't figure out why. "Ted, I think it might be a good idea."

"You want us to pack up right now."

"Sure Ted, there's nothing wrong with a little spontaneity. I'll get a small bag for Holly."

"Sweet! Hey dad, can I get some money for gas? I need to fill up the car. Dustin wants to take down his radio tower. He might need the help after the earthquake. I can just meet up with you somewhere on the road, like a motel or diner. That's cool right?" Ted hands him a \$5.

"Well, hold on there!" Mrs. Wheeler protests.

"Come on, what's the matter? I'll drive with my friends. It will be a nice family-friendly road trip. I just want to help out Dustin first."

"You're planning on driving all your friends someplace out East that Dustin's mom knows?"

"Just me, Dustin, Lucas and Max; small group. Will went home this morning.

"And the Jane girl, she's not coming either?"

"No mom!" Mike nearly spits.

"Well, won't Max be uncomfortable as the only girl in the car."

"She hangs out with us all the time!"

"Oh really, I haven't seen her at the house?"

"We don't really hang out in the basement much anymore. Is it cool?"
Mike waits not so patiently.

"Fine! I guess, just be safe. We'll all meet out there I guess. Take a map."

"Cool, I'm heading to Dustin's," he says running out the door without a glance back.

END OF PART 2

~A.N. Hope you're enjoying the story! I had to include some fun bit with Eleven still learning about the world and today's lesson was on Disney World! OH by the way, I don't own Mickey Mouse or Disney World and wouldn't claim to ever. Leave a comment about how much you love Eleven! :)

21. Chapter 21

PART 3: The lab

Earlier that morning around 5:45am

Eleven, Will and Mike silently creep down the steps of Mike's home. His houseguests stealthily climb into the backseat of his car. Once they are safely a block and a half down the street, the two pop their heads up extremely proud of themselves.

"WOOHOO!" Mike hollers. "I told you it would work."

"That was amazing! Absolutely amazing!"

"I was so nervous," Eleven says breathlessly and puts her hand on Mike's neck. He grips it and kisses it.

"Hopefully the others will make it out fine. Will, can you check the radio?"

Will's bag is stuffed with radios—covertly silenced for the mission. He turns them all and passes one to each of them.

"This is Mike. I am en route to base with Eleven and Will. What is everyone's ETA? Over."

Lucas woke up at the crack of dawn. Although no one else in town might consider leaving a practical option, the party was not prepared for them to endanger themselves by stupidly staying in Hawkins when the next earthquake struck. Lucas's mission was to head to The Hawkins Post distribution factory to print 200 pages of an additional notice for each distributed copy of The Hawkins Post released. He was in and out like a ghost.

When every parent opened their newspaper that morning, the first thing they would read was about the dangers of staying in Hawkins and the likelihood of another more dangerous earthquake. If they weren't possessed to leave already, then hopefully this would help them the rest of the way.

"Working on Operation Paper Delivery! Over," Lucas pants breathily into his walkie talkie in response to Mike. He is sweating intensely as he makes extreme speeds, cruising down the quiet streets of Hawkins.

Meanwhile, Dustin, who had woken up early to pack snacks for his friends and his mother, took it easy, biking lazily down to Mirkwood. When he arrived, he was surprised by the black government vans that seemed to be lingering in the area. He could only imagine what they were up to. He found a good hiding spot in front of the house in the bushes and took out his binoculars. As far as he could tell, no one was in any of the vans.

"We may have a problem, or we may have confirmation of what we feared—government vans spotted near Mirkwood and the Lab. Over," Dustin responds.

The present around 8am

Mike, having gotten the okay from his parents, sets off in his old jalopy for the second time that morning. He picks up the walkie talkie he keeps on his passenger seat. "I am en route for the second time. Is everyone there? Over." It's staticky for a moment before he gets a response from Dustin.

"Lucas and I have been here for over an hour! Get your slow butt down here," he teases. Mike laughs happily. Somehow, they did it. Unfortunately, Eleven breaks onto the line with some news that wipes the smile from his face.

"Mike, Max never showed up. I'm worried. She hasn't radioed anyone this morning."

"I'll drop by and look into it," he says resolutely.

After last night, the last thing he wants to do is make eye contact with her stepdad. He doesn't park out front. He learned his lesson already. Mike exits the car a half block away. Their garage is closed and there's no car directly parked out front. He walks around the back. He knows from Lucas that Max has an accessible window. When he gets there, the curtain is mostly drawn besides a slim

opening. He can see Max crying on her bed. He looks around quickly before he taps a finger to the glass. Max looks up shakily and her eyes widen. Mike motions for her to open the window, but she shakes her head. She grabs a notepad.

It's locked

He raises his hands not knowing what that means.

From the outside

Max points to where the lock is. A brand-new padlock has been added to the window. Mike lifts it and sees it requires a key to open. He looks at her confused. Max sighs as if to say, *This is my life*. Mike doesn't need to ask about the key; he already knows who has it. He wonders what happened when she said she wanted to ride along with her friends, who just happened to be all boys, on top of the fact that she was spotted sneaking out with the same boys last night. Mike takes some of the responsibility for letting this happen.

He walks away from the window, ducking along the side of the house to find something big. He comes back to her window with a large rock. He gestures for her to back away. She closes her eyes terrified by the possible sound. She slides her nightstand to cover her bedroom door just in case. Mike counts down wordlessly and hits the lock. It makes a sharp noise with bright sparks. It isn't busted yet. He reangles the rock learning from the last time. He smashes down on the lock even harder and it busts. Max looks terrified; she is pretty sure she heard a shout from inside her house. Mike quickly works to shove open the window just wide enough for her to get out.

"We need to run now!" Max says as Mike grabs her hand yanking her out. They run to the car just as her stepdad heads around to the front of the house, just missing which direction they sped off in.

~A.N. Sorry for the delay- I started school again. Hope you enjoy this chapter which includes just a little Mike and Max bonding! Next chapter make sure to look out for LUMAX!

22. Chapter 22

Lucas runs out the door the moment he hears Mike's recognizable engine coming up the drive. Eleven, Will and Dustin linger on the porch. Mike and Max had radioed them from the car about what happened.

"MAX!" Lucas yells. She opens the door, and he nearly lifts her from her seat. "I was really worried. I hate that son-of-...", he holds himself back. "I can't believe he would do that to you."

"I'm fine Lucas, really. I—" He won't let her go. At first, it suffocates her, but a few moments later, she likes it and smiles. Then it hits her that her stepdad had put a lock on her window to keep her from leaving, and she bursts into tears. Mike saw her like this earlier through her window. He heads straight to his girlfriend, who hugs him tight.

When they're all inside, Dustin passes around what he snagged them for breakfast, two boxes of sugary cereal and a quart of milk from his fridge. Will sniffs it suspiciously before sipping straight from the carton. Dustin didn't bring dishes or utensils so they are popping little balls of dried cereal into their mouths.

"Alright so this is the situation. Typically, now is where I would like us to have backup, preferably in the form of Steve, Robin, Erica, heck even Nancy and Jonathan would be useful, but they're all out-of-state or *in college* out-of-state so we're going to have to do this alone," he sighs disappointedly.

"Hey, you missed us the last time, but the Griswold Family held their own against the Mind Flayer! We confronted Billy at the sauna while he was under its control too!"

"Hey, I'm not saying anything about your set of skills! I know it wasn't easy. I was trapped in a Russian elevator, and then a Russian lair, and Steve got beaten to an inch of his life and then we had to sneak out of the Russian lair!" he emphasizes intensely, getting wilder with every word. He takes a breath.

Mike looks down at his feet.

Dustin says sternly and silently, "But last time, we had her," he points at El.

She looks at all their expectant faces staring back at her. Mike slaps his hand down from pointing.

"We can do this. It can't be related to the Upside Down; this is a simple government experiment sort of thing," Mike replies confidently.

"Was the experimentation with Eleven what you would call "simple government experiment" stuff too?" Dustin adds the sarcastic bunny-ears. "We need to be prepared for anything! Hawkins' Lab is being monitored heavily. You weren't outside keeping a lookout all morning. They're swarming that place! Something is terribly wrong!" Dustin blurts.

"Calm down Dr. Brown—we get it!" Lucas interrupts annoyed by Dustin's typical end-of-the-world antics. Max pulls him back to earth literally, helping him get comfortably seated on the floor again after he jumped up at the end of Dustin's monologue.

"Not to interrupt, but do you think that telephone still works?" Will says tensely distracted. He's been peeking over at the phone at the wall the whole time. "I need to call my mom before she drives down here looking for me."

"I doubt it will work. What would you even tell her?" Mike asks.

"I guess a mixture of the truth. She's going to hear about the earthquake and assume something, but hopefully, El and I will be out of any danger and on the way back home," Will answers matter-of-factly.

Mike is momentarily stunned.

When he was younger, it really felt like they could live forever, and that bad guys and monsters would lose in the end. If you played the game right, you could even win. What he'd begun to learn is that they were all vulnerable. Hopper and Billy were the last two victims,

but it could be one of them next. Only Eleven and Max knew what it was like to lose someone close to them like that. Will lived his horror, he had to live with his own demons, and he'd probably never be passed it. Mike only had to deal with the trauma of day-to-day life when he loses El.

Mike finally has the party back together again, but it will be over soon—if they all make it out alive. He would lose her again no matter how their mission turned out because at the end of the day, she didn't live there anymore. They could hunt monsters and bad guys living out Dungeons and Dragons and all the arcade games they want, but the truth was they were growing up and the real world was not a game.

"Right yeah," Mike mutters to Will before redirecting his attention back at Dustin. "How should we do this?" he asks. Dustin nods slow and eager. His fresh set of pearly whites creep slowly into a smile.

"I think I have an idea."

TO BE CONTINUED

~A.N. I'm back for another chapter! We're about to dig into Hawkins Lab again. Get ready! Any strategies for how you would sneak in? Leave a comment! TY